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ABSTRACT

Arts Genesis, Inc. (AGI) forms partnerships with diverse communities to assist them in finding fulfillment through the arts by meeting their own self-defined needs; uses arts experiences to encourage discovery, creativity, and diversity; and continually strives for excellence in the arts and education. Arts Genesis grew out of "Project Choki." "Choki" means "star" in the Yaqui Indian language. Project Choki became a schoolwide arts education project in 1986. Arts units are co-developed and taught by professional artist-educators, classroom teachers, parents, community members, and special consultants. Arts projects are integrated with other curriculum (e.g., a project in mask making involved students in dance, drama, and writing in Spanish and English). History and science projects have been coordinated with arts projects. Projects described include puppets, opera, other drama projects, quilting, collage, photography, murals, music, and dance. Major media and artistic concepts are revisited several times between first and fifth grade in a spiral curriculum that develops age-appropriate ideas and skills. Through the arts, Project Choki students have developed imagination, observation, and concentration. The model was expanded through a new project called "ArtsBuild" to include a second, larger school. Both schools have extremely diverse student populations. (EMK)

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ED 425 399

Chapter One

Art, Education, and Community: Arts Genesis, Inc.

Carol S. Kestler

ARTS GENESIS, INC. (AGI) was formed 10 years ago to create multicultural and community-based arts programming partnerships that enrich, educate, and empower. Its purpose is to foster progressive social change through arts education projects that address social and cultural crises currently affecting the human family. AGI forms partnerships with diverse communities to assist them in finding fulfillment through the arts by meeting their own self-defined needs; uses arts experiences to encourage discovery, creativity, and diversity; and continually strives for excellence in the arts and in education.

The uniqueness of AGI rests upon its (a) commitment to arts education for all learners; (b) collegial relationships of AGI Artist/Educators who develop, implement, and evaluate programming in collaboration with our educational partners; (c) emphasis on working partnerships with schools, community organizations, and other educators; and (d) recognition of the social, cultural, emotional, and political realities that shape our participants' lives.

ARTS GENESIS has been recognized as building two of the 11 most successful programs in the U.S. combining youth art and substance abuse prevention. AGI is featured in *ARTWORKS! Prevention Programs for Youth & Communities* published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in March, 1997. *Business Week* magazine presented Richey Elementary School with one of 10 national Business Week Awards For Instructional Innovation: Schools With An Arts Driven Curriculum in August 1997, in recognition of PROJECT CHOKI, a program in collaboration with AGI. Other organizations joining *Business Week* in selecting winning schools were (a) The McGraw Hill Educational and Professional Publishing Group, (b) Getty Institute for the Arts, (c) the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, and (d) the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

ARTS GENESIS grew out of PROJECT CHOKI. PROJECT CHOKI began 17 years ago as an art experience for first-grade children at Richey Elementary School in Old Pascua Yaqui Village, Tucson, Arizona. CHOKI means "star" in the Yaqui Indian language. Old Pascua has, since the early 1900s, been the home of a group of Pascua Yaqui people who once lived, traveled, and traded freely over a large part of Sonora, Mexico, and Arizona. Old Pascua borders an equally historic Mexican-American Barrio. This produces a neighborhood of unique culture, energy, and imagery.

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The Richey population of 230 children is 44% Yaqui, 44% Hispanic, 10% Anglo, 2% African-American and Oriental. More than 20% of the students are physically, mentally and/or emotionally challenged special learners. 45 staff and 35 parents, over 90% Yaqui and Hispanic, are also PROJECT CHOKI participants.

The first project at Richey involved first graders in bandage gauze mask-making. The students' care, their attention to detail, and their unusually high levels of empathy, cooperation, and mutual support, made it possible for us to explore masks and mask-making in a greater depth than previously accomplished with intermediate and even adult students. Finished masks contained allusions to cultural experiences and strong personal aesthetic statements.

Students proved willing to dramatize and perform in their masks. Masked performance, including dance and mime, is an important part of Yaqui culture and a central feature of the world famous Yaqui Easter Ceremonies. The first graders were drawing from and elaborating upon family and community traditions, as well as using skills taught in PROJECT CHOKI classes.

Students also wrote about, discussed, analyzed, appreciated, and shared their experience. Their use of language was more fluent and colorful than their usual writing in both Spanish and English. Most understood and internalized what they had accomplished in the context of world-wide mask traditions. One student, pointing to a masked African sculpture I had brought into the classroom, told me: "If I went to his village in Africa, he would know what my mask was about!"

Fifteen years ago, I began to work with the Richey Elementary School staff and the new Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) Department of Native American Studies to develop culturally based Yaqui programming at Richey. Together with the new TUSD Yaqui language specialists and community elders, PROJECT CHOKI looked at appropriate ways for students to explore and express themselves about Yaqui culture and ceremonies in a public school setting. Students abstracted Yaqui symbols and began to discuss their culture with non-Yaqui peers and adults. Non-Yaqui students could see, and interpret, Yaqui cultural artifacts and ideas from their own perspectives.

We used traditional Yaqui Pahkola masks as still life subjects, working with the resulting drawings as we would any other subject matter:

(a) studying and drawing the masks with attention to form and design;
(b) discussing and critiquing the resultant work;
(c) learning about the use of the masks from elders and traditional teachers;
(d) comparing and contrasting these masks and their use with masks in their widest context, including traditional and artistic masks from a variety of cultures, theater and dance masks from around the world, and masks in sports and industrial applications; and
(e) looking at and discussing the work of artists who used masks in two-dimensional formats.

Images resulting from this work are now on permanent display in the Arizona State Museum, and are part of a 40-piece show from the PROJECT

CHOKI archives currently traveling under the auspices of ATLATL, the national Native American arts service organization. Group-designed fantasy masks, several feet high, are part of the permanent collection of the Tucson Children's Museum.

Eleven years ago, PROJECT CHOKI brought in a puppeteer to work with students and teachers in grades 3 and 4, Yaqui educators and elders. Students created giant puppets to explore and dramatize Yaqui history. For the first time, Non-Yaqui audiences heard the story of how the traditional Yaqui flute and drum entered the world. A Deer Dancer (a third grade Richey student) appeared on a school stage for the first time in the U.S. The puppets became a permanent part of the school scene and were used in the classroom for many kinds of language exploration, storytelling, and drama activities.

The following year, four classes participated in the "Opera In Old Pascua" project. Fifth-grade students gathered family stories and traditions and used these to write, produce, and perform the opera, "Yoeme" that told the story of the migration of Pascua Yaqui people from Rio Yaqui, Mexico, to the village of Old Pascua. Students interwove family history and Yaqui legends with a study of the railroads and Tucson settlement patterns. They used Yaqui, Spanish, and English text to capture the flavor of their own language and storytelling.

Each of the classes picked their own theme, wrote words and music, designed staging and scenery. The fourth grade class, working with their Mexican-American classroom teacher, wrote "Cancion de la Raza" (Song of our People), about music and dance traditions in their own families and community.

Sixth graders chose the theme of gangs and drugs with "Too Cool for School." At first, they wanted to show the excitement and glamour of dropping out. Then, as they developed their characters, they began to worry about what would happen to them. As students seriously explored what they knew had happened to dropouts in the community, they changed their libretto entirely. The final chorus became, "Don't be a fool, Be really cool, Stay in school." Teachers and artists who worked with this group learned a great lesson about keeping hands off and trusting that the artistic process itself will elicit genuine searching and ultimate honesty from students.

Our Intermediate Special Education class was visited by "Aliens From Outer Space," who invited the students to come visit their home planet in recognition of all their special talents and abilities. Our decision to have these students work as a group, rather than mainstreaming them with their peers in the other classrooms, paid off in their opportunity to look at themselves as special learners with unique talents and abilities. Their teacher was amazed at their ability to produce and perform their own opera, and delighted by the growth in language, self-esteem and cooperation that resulted from the project.

The "Opera In Old Pascua" project drew on the expertise and leadership of Dr. Carroll A. Rinehart, L.H.D., who has led some 500 similar projects throughout the US. He was supported by community musicians, dancers, and theater artists.

In 1990, a Yaqui elder and educator approached us about starting a traditional Yaqui children's dance group at Richey Elementary School. This group would provide further links between the school and traditional Yaqui homes, guarantee the training of Yaqui ceremonial performers, and assure an understanding of Yaqui culture for non-Yaqui students who would be encouraged to participate. The Richey School Yaqui Children's Cultural Dance Group has now performed for more than 60,000 people throughout Arizona, at schools, community events, and traditional Yaqui ceremonies. It was the first traditional Yaqui dance group in a public school setting in the U.S. or Mexico. Similar groups have since been formed in two Tucson middle and high schools.

PROJECT CHOKI became a school-wide arts education program in 1986. 800 hours of programming per year have included weekly music classes that build basic skills in language, math, and coordination, as well as music. 5th and 6th graders have been able to start band and orchestra work on string and wind instruments on an intermediate rather than beginner level.

Richey students, while only 2% of their middle school population, typically form 25%-35% of the band, orchestra, and choral groups.

Joy of Movement and *Imaginary Journeys Around the World* for grades K-4 have built basic performance skills, including creative movement, story enactment, and voice improvisation. Students also learn children's games and chants from around the world.

Annual puppetry residencies for all grades have culminated in performances based on children's literature selected and taught by the classroom teachers. Teachers, students, and AGI artist/educators have also used puppets to analyze conflict situations, teach about other cultures and their aesthetic traditions, practice behavioral and coping skills, and learn about history, and health.

Arts units are co-developed and taught by AGI professional artist/educators, classroom teachers, parents, community members, and special cultural and subject area consultants to enhance and supplement other classroom studies. For example, second graders explored hats and head-covers from around the world as an introduction to a series of experiences with felting, spinning, and weaving integrated into the social studies curriculum. Students made felt blocks and formed them into hats of their own design. They laid and felted their group project in the traditional manner, by stamping on the wet wool mat to the accompaniment of drumming and chanting. The group produced a 5 x 5 foot hanging that illustrates the desert, with its plant, animal, and human relationships. The piece still hangs in the Richey Elementary School entrance hall 11 years later.

Subsequent experiences over the next four years included learning to wash and card wool, spin with a drop spindle, weave on small card looms, and, finally, on a large Navajo loom. Working with a Navajo weaver in small groups, students experienced the traditional "loom talk"– the story telling, oral history, natural history, and personal discussion that take place between generations around the loom. They also studied the care of the wool-bearing animals, and the plants used in dying and preparing the yarns both in their classrooms and

in field studies with traditional Native American, Latino, University, and museum instructors.

Classroom teachers and Arts Genesis artist/educators co-create units that answer broad curriculum needs. In a 4th grade class, quilting was used to introduce math manipulatives. Each student produced, wrote about, and explained a personal quilt block to the class. It was executed first with the math blocks, then in paper, and finally in fabric. One block, for example, was made in memory of a child's dog who had just died, and who "loved bright colors."

Another year, 3rd graders produced a quilt illustrating the "Ku Bird" story that appears in many versions in Yaqui and Hispanic traditions. Students brought their own family versions to class, then combined them to produce the story for their quilt that still hangs at Richey Elementary School some 10 years later. Students discussed how different endings brought out different morals to the story, how they emphasized the roles of different characters, and what each taught about how people were expected to live together. Individual writings, group dramatizations of various story versions, plus reading similar stories and fables from around the world completed the study.

In one 3rd grade social studies unit, students first photographed their community, then produced quilt pieces showing important places and activities. They arranged these through group discussion and negotiation, producing a 4-foot by 6-foot felt quilt which also still graces Richey walls 9 years later. This was a unique way to study map making, as well as community traditions and how people share the streets in a unique multicultural neighborhood. I will never forget seeing Vietnamese people barely able to turn the corner with their New Year's Dragon that year, as a masked Chapiaka (Yaqui ceremonial dancer) emerged from the desert shrubbery!

A 5th grade health unit was the starting place for a drawing and sculpture unit entitled *It's Me!* Students gathered and made collages of personal mementos, wrote autobiographies, projected career choices, photographed each other, drew, and finally molded three dimensional self portraits on styrofoam hat blocks.

A study of desert plants and animals began a two-year unit on silk screen stenciling by grades 5 and 6. Students drew animals and plants from nature and from scientific drawings. They took field trips, then wrote about and discussed desert relationships. Students cooperatively produced the screens and printed banners that still hang, after 10 years, in city offices and homes. Their designs have been sold on greeting cards, tee-shirts, and shopping bags to raise scholarship money for themselves and for during-school and after-school programming.

Major media and artistic concepts are revisited several times between first and fifth grade in a spiral curriculum that develops age appropriate ideas and skills. There is ample opportunity for experimentation in both individual and group projects. Each art making experience finishes with opportunities to reflect on accomplishments individually in sketchbook or journals and in the creative group. Group projects combine various disciplines and media, often finishing with a celebration and performance in drama, music, or dance.

Classroom teachers and staff attend professional development workshops with Arts Geneses artist/educators as well as participating in the classroom experiences along with their students. Parents and other family members, including siblings of all ages, also attend community workshops with AGI professionals.

Through the arts, PROJECT CHOKI students have developed imagination, observation, and concentration. They have analyzed complex mathematical problems individually and in groups. They have shared research, personal stories, and cultural celebrations. They have integrated their knowledge in ways that enhance their capabilities as individuals and as a community of learners. The first class to experience PROJECT CHOKI for 6 years was also the first in which every child that we can trace graduated middle school. CHOKI was also part of the intensive educational effort that cut the Old Pascua middle school dropout rate from 30% to zero, and has helped to hold it below 10%. During the same time, the percentage of high school graduates has doubled.

Last year, after 15 years of success, Arts Genesis linked Richey Elementary School and PROJECT CHOKI with Pueblo Gardens Elementary School in a new project called **ArtsBuild.** ArtsBuild carries the CHOKI model into a school almost half again as large as Richey, with 350 students. The population is 68% Hispanic, 13% Black, 12% Anglo, 4% Laotian, and 3% Native American. 11% are special learners.

The most significant collaboration during this first year was the ArtsBuild Community Mural Project. Grades 3, 4, and 5 (208 students in all) joined energies to produce a mural 88 feet long by 6 feet high depicting their greatest hopes and wildest dreams for their communities. The mural is entirely the work of the student artists and vibrates with their color and fantastic imagery.

Working with Arts Genesis artist/educators, students used creative dance experiences to build and understand community. After embodying these experiences, they interpreted them in their journals. Classes composed and played music about their community, and again, illustrated and interpreted this in their journals. They wrote individual and group poems about their mural and the growth and change in themselves because of its success.

Richey Elementary School and Pueblo Gardens Elementary School students came together to discuss and create art about their mural experiences. The mural was permanently installed at Borders Books & Music, a major Tucson bookstore. It was unveiled on Cinco de Mayo, 1997, amidst much fanfare and excitement, at a party for the artists, their families, and friends. The mural has become nationally known as an outstanding example of business and community collaboration in art and education.

A total of 600 students, pre-school through grade 5, participated in ArtsBuild during the first year. Results of two interim evaluations reveal that ArtsBuild has made significant progress in achieving its program objectives and is well on its way to achieving its overall program goal:

> to enhance the learning environment for students, parents,
> and teachers through the visual, performing, and literary arts
> by creating opportunities for learners to reach their full

potential as individuals and as part of a learning community.

ARTS GENESIS believes every person has the right to an education that develops imagination, creativity, responsibility, and a sense of wonder. Over the next two years we plan to show and document how art builds a better educational environment, and therefore more successful lives, for students and their communities.